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SUBJECT: SAUDI RED CRESCENT ACTIVE IN DARFUR, SOMALIA,
NIGERIA, MALDIVES

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Saudi Red Crescent is operational in several countries but has the bulk of its operations within Saudi Arabia. They will be building more than 20 new health centers in Darfur, and possibly water distribution stations, but are not involved in providing any relief to IDPs in Pakistan. They are looking to increase their staff by 2,000 over the next year as well as acquire 30 new aircraft. End summary.

SAUDI RED CRESCENT: EXPANDING AND ON THE GROUND

¶2. (SBU) In an August 1 meeting with Econcouns, the acting president of the Saudi Red Crescent (SRC), Faiz Ali Al-Ahmari, gave an overview of the organization's domestic and international operations. The SRC currently has 5,000 employees and is looking to expand that to 7,000 over the next year. Unlike the large portion of Saudi assistance that is delivered with a checkbook, the SRC combines a variety of approaches, ranging from deploying teams of Saudis as part of 'mobile' hospitals to hiring local staff to carry out their programs.

ASSISTANCE TO DARFUR

¶3. (SBU) Al-Ahmari confirmed recent press reports stating the SRC would be channeling roughly \$20 million (other sources have reported \$18 million) in Saudi assistance to Darfur. He said this would come in the form of 21 new health centers (some media reports indicated 28). Al-Ahmari emphasized the \$20 million donation was just to cover start-up costs, and that further contributions would follow to support the operation of the health centers. Al-Ahmari did not indicate the projected dollar amount of this additional assistance. These centers would be staffed by some Saudi personnel, but predominantly by Sudanese. A recent Sudanese News Agency article asserted the SRC would build 21 water "stations" in addition to the health centers.

OTHER RECIPIENTS

¶4. (SBU) When asked what other countries the SRC is active in, Al-Ahmari responded that they are currently building a hospital in Kyrgyzstan, operate a number of health clinics in the Maldives, and have projects in Nigeria, Somalia, Pakistan, and others. The SRC has just recently closed their office in Kosovo and has not to date been involved in providing any assistance to internal refugees in Pakistan

displaced by recent fighting in the northwest. (Though through other channels, Saudi Arabia donated five plane-loads of relief supplies to Pakistan.)

DOMESTIC OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION

¶5. (SBU) Within the Kingdom, the SRC operates several hundred ambulances and has indicated an interest to the Embassy's Commercial section in acquiring more. According to Al-Ahmari, the SRC is in the process of buying 30 Embraer aircraft for domestic use. He said that during the upcoming Hajj they will have 2 aircraft on standby to move patients around the country if needed to ease the burden on hospitals in and around Mecca.

¶6. (SBU) The SRC used to report to the Ministry of Health. However, with the 2006 appointment of HRH Prince Faisal bin Abdullah bin Abdelaziz to head the organization, this changed. They now report through Prince Faisal directly to the King (Faisal's father). Al-Ahmari said this gives them "more support," identifying their relative freedom to allocate their budget as they see fit (90 percent of which comes from the government) as an indication of this autonomy.

BIOGRAPHIC NOTE

¶7. (SBU) Al-Ahmari revealed that he had received his masters degree in public health at an unidentified university in New Orleans. He has visited the U.S. twice since his graduation, and seems to have a positive impression of the U.S., but has

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not visited since 9/11. His son is currently visiting San Diego for the summer.

¶8. (SBU) Al-Ahmari noted in passing his admiration of the President's speech in Cairo.

COMMENT

¶9. (SBU) Local contacts tell us that Prince Faisal is eager to raise the profile of the Saudi Red Crescent. With the Prince absent on holiday, Al-Ahmari was unwilling to discuss possible areas of cooperation between SRC and OFDA. We will raise this when the Prince returns.

ERDMAN